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ABSTRACT

A study using students' grades was conducted to examine the validity of the prerequisites for the Criminal Justice Curriculum at Kirkwood Community College (Cedar Rapids, IA). Using transcripts of all students who had enrolled in selected courses targeted as needing prerequisites, a random sample was obtained, tabulated, and analyzed. The study investigated whether the student had taken a recommended prerequisite, and Composition 1 (Grammar and Punctuation) or Composition 2 (Research and Term Paper Writing). Study findings included the following: (1) the majority of the students in the sample were Liberal Arts majors (32.1%), followed by Allied Health majors (21.4%) and Law Enforcement majors (19.0); (2) students who earned a grade of "C" or better in the recommended prerequisite were more likely to get a grade of "C" or better in the targeted course; (3) not taking the prerequisite course did not seem to adversely affect the students' grades as much as taking it and doing poorly; and (4) students who took Composition 1 or 2 did not appear to do significantly better or worse regardless of their final grade outcomes in the composition courses. (AYC)

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE VALIDITY OF PREREQUISITES IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE CURRICULUM AT KIRKWOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Julius O. Koefoed, Jr., M.P.A.

Kirkwood Community College

A PRACTICUM PRESENTED TO NOVA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

JC 850 240

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ABSTRACT

This study was an examination of the validity of prerequisites in the Criminal Justice Curriculum as measured by higher student grades. Using transcripts of all students who had enrolled in the courses targeted by the author and offered during the academic year 1982-3, at Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, a random sample was obtained, tabulated, and analyzed.

The results indicated students who took the author's recommended prerequisites did have slightly higher grades. In no cases was the impact statistically significant. Composition 1 and 2 were also examined to determine if a student who had taken these courses would earn better grades than a student who had not taken them. The data indicated that there was no significant difference. Students who did not take the courses often earned better grades than students who took them and did poorly.

The recommendations included further research of a broader section of the College to determine the effect of prerequisites in other disciplines. Also, the author recommended that the administration consider the larger ramifications of the fact that most targeted courses did not require written examinations as a major part of the students grade, but relied on multiple choice tests.

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Introduction

The purpose of this practicum was to determine the validity and effectiveness of the author's recommended prerequisities in the Criminal Justice Curriculum at Kirkwood Community College. The concept of prerequisites was one of considerable discussion within the Arts and Sciences Division. Early in the academic development of Kirkwood Community College, the Board of Directors determined that the institution would be a comprehensive community college in the broadest sense of the word. They hired a Superintendent who believed in that philosophy and under his guidance the staff labored, "to design a curriculum that was consistent with the institutionally designed mission." (The Carnegie Foundation, 1977:50). Pursuant to that mission, a policy to maximize accessability was implemented and prerequisites were restricted to a very few courses.

The removal of prerequisites precipitated extensive discussion among the faculty, and continues to do so today. The discussion centers around the reactions to declining standards, the open admissions policy, the decline in literacy, and a whole host of topics that stem from the social unrest of the 1960's, and education's reaction to that unrest. (Copperman, 1978:106-111).

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A number of the faculty members argue that they have to present material "...the mastery of which is assumed to have been dealt with elsewhere." (Eisner, 1977:188).

The deletion of prerequisites from the curriculum resulted in a great deal of pedagogical discussion, but it generated little scientific examination or investigation of the need for prerequisites at Kirkwood Community College. The value of prerequisites can be stated in the following quote:

> The strength of units devoted to a single mode of experience and knowledge is that they permit systematic attention to be given to the progressive mastery of closely interrelated concepts, patterns of reasoning, and qualities of mind, by radically restricting the character of the objectives with which they are concerned." (Eisner, 1977:188).

The author initiated a scientific inquiry into the dilemma of prerequisites as it affected the Criminal Justice Program at Kirkwood Community College. The author obtained grade sheets for the targeted courses, which he believed should have prerequisites.

A random sample was drawn from the population of all students who had taken the targeted courses during the academic year 1982-3. Targeted courses included many which are part of the Criminal Justice Curriculum at Kirkwood Community College. They are listed in the procedures section of this practicum. Transcripts of the students in the sample were examined to determine if they

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had taken the author's recommended prerequisite. Transcripts were also examined to determine if the student in the sample had taken either Composition 1, (Grammar and Punctuation), or Composition 2, (Research and Term Paper Writing). Other data was also collected, coded, and analyzed by use of A-Stat, a computer software statistical analysis package based upon Princeton University's P-Stat. The results are displayed in the results section of this practicum.

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Background and Significance

Kirkwood Community College is, and has been since its inception, a comprehensive community college. The curriculum of the Arts and Sciences Division has only a limited number of prerequisite courses. This is in accordance with the policies promulgated by the College's Board of Directors. During the course of study in the core module "Curriculum Development" the author became interested in evaluating and revising the curriculum of the Criminal Justice Programs. The evaluation and revision of the curriculum is a requirement, if the College intends to provide a meaningful educational experience, and if the College's leaders want to make valid decisions about the direction of the curriculum. As exemplified in the following citation:

> Evaluation (appraisal) is the systematic documentation of the consequences (results or effects) of programs (curriculums) and the determination of their worth (merit) in order to make decisions about them. (Green, 1977:4)

As a result of comments made to the author by some members of the Criminal Justice Advisory Committee, the author suggested to the Social Sciences Department Head that prerequisites be included for certain courses. The author was advised by the department head that

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prerequisites were discouraged by certain administrators at the College, and a need would have to be shown before new prerequisites would be permitted. This attitude apparently reflected the basic philosophy of the College's Board of Directors.

That philosophy stated that the College should be accessible to all students, and barriers keeping students out of classes should be removed. The traditional view, that prerequisites are the natural building blocks within an academic discipline (Eisner, 1977:188), was conveniently put aside. When the traditional view of prerequisites was overlooked in favor of maximizing opportunity for students, it generated a great deal of discussion among faculty and staff members and continues to do so today.

There is a school of thought among some faculty that "... nothing has more profoundly affected their (the comprehensive community college's) evolving mission than the accommodations made to the new student populations." (McCartan, 1983:677). Further, some faculty members argue that these accommodations have reduced the amount of material they can cover in a given class because they have to repeat material which was covered in a previous class.

Other faculty members simply refuse to cover material that was taught in a course that the consensus of the faculty in the department reflects should be a

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prerequisite even though the catalog does not. This causes some students to fail the course because they do not understand the material. They do not understand the material because they did not get the foundation in the course which they should have taken as a prerequisite. The discussion has continued, but the curriculum has not changed materially over the past decade. The history of the comprehensive community college in the 1970's saw an increase in the new students, coming from the lower third of the high school graduates. (Cross, 1974:18). This body of new students also includes "non-traditional" students, (Roueche, 1972:63) who require different support functions from the college. They will also arrive without the academic foundation that others are presumed to have; they will need the advantages of prerequisites most.

During the Winter Quarter of 1983, the author met with Dr. Louise McCants, who was, at that time, the Dean of the Arts and Sciences Divison at Kirkwood Community College. The author proposed to undertake a scientific study of the prerequisites as they affected the Criminal Justice curriculum. The goal was to determine if the need for prerequisites existed. The author proposed the hypothesis that students would do better, in terms of grades, if they took the courses in the author's recommended sequence. The proposed sequences were supported by a number of the author's colleagues in the

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Social Sciences Department.

Dean McCants was receptive to the proposal and offered constructive suggestions for the design of the study. Dean McCants also suggested that it might be productive for the author to explore an additional variable during the study. The suggested additional variable was the effect of having taken Composition 1, or Composition 2, upon the student's grade in the targeted courses. The author agreed to this suggestion and added this variable to the study.

The author argued from the position that when the administrators of the institution, in response to direction from the Board of Directors, deleted certain prerequisites from the curriculum they were making all courses accessible to the students, but they were also making it more likely that the students would fail. The author pointed out that the literature shows that although the Board of Directors was well-meaning in their response to state law mandating that Kirkwood be a "comprehensive community college", education has responded to the leading "experts" in the field many times in the past only to find that they were incorrect in their assumptions and many of the "improvements" in education, which they advocated, merely created new problems. (Block, 1983:183).

The author argued that Liberal Arts courses which were part of the Criminal Justice curriculum should remain

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a part of the curriculum because: "Throughout the technical course sequences, liberal learning must be encouraged, integrated and practiced." (Schwerin, 1983:171). The author does not desire to remove the liberal arts requirements, but, rather, to improve the abilities of the student and the probability of the student's success in these courses. The author is a supporter of the liberal arts education in technical programs because:

> It addresses the student's full growth potential for the future, the interpretive and analytical skills, the knowledge on which to base future career and personal decisions, and the critical thinking which may determine social and political directions for the individual. (Schwerin, 1983:170).

According to members of the Criminal Justice advisory committee, the skills and characteristics to which Schwerin refers, are required of individuals who are seeking a career in the Criminal Justice field. Recently, the Acting Dean of the University of Iowa, Gerhard Loewenberg, was quoted as stating that, "If you don't have a liberal arts education, you can't survive very well in today's society." (Francisco, 1984:17A). The Dean went on to point out that the University is unique in that the professional schools require a student to get a grounding in liberal arts, and all students at the University begin in the liberal arts. (Francisco: 1984:17A). Kirkwood's

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Career Parallel Arts and Sciences Majors also must complete the liberal arts core requirements as part of their degree program. We should not delete the requirements of the Arts and Sciences Liberal Arts degree to simply teach technical courses, because society has found the cognitive skills and attitudes that are associated with liberal learning are absent in those who are trained only from a technical standpoint. (Rudolph, 1984:17).

Rather, we should be strengthening the Associate Degree requirements in accord with what is needed by the agencies, organizations and other institutions of higher learning that receive our graduates, and non-graduates. Without meeting the needs of these groups, the College loses some of its community support. (Alfred, 1984:4-5).

In view of these arguments, it was incumbent upon the author to initiate this research, and determine if the curriculum was in need of revision, addition or deletion. One can never forget that "practical education finds its home is less prestigious public colleges, community colleges and proprietary schools" (Block, 1983:197), and because of this community college personnel must be constantly on the alert to insure that the programs offered are of the highest quality. This requires ongoing evaluation of the curriculum. This process is relevant to the Curriculum and Development core module, to the Criminal Justice Programs and to the College.

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Procedures

The study was accomplished by examination of grades of a random sample of students. The sample was drawn from the population of all students who had taken targeted courses in the Social Sciences during the academic year 1982-3. This was accomplished by taking copies of all grade sheets from the targeted courses offered by the Social Sciences Department during the academic year 1982-3. These records are maintained by the departmental secretary and were readily available. The total population of students was 1,677. By utilization of a random number table, (Mosteller:366), the author selected one student's name from each consecutive group of twenty names on the copies of grade sheets. If a grade sheet did not have a full twenty names to select from, then a sufficient number from the next sheet, or sheets, were used to provide a full group of twenty. This provided a sample size of 84, or 5%. The sample size was considered to be sufficient at 5% based upon the known homogenous nature of the student population at Kirkwood Community College. Backstrom and Hursh-Cesar, (1981:67), state "The more similiar people are, the smaller the sample can be." Once the sample was selected, the students' transcripts, which are maintained on microfiche,

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were examined and certain data was collected. The data included the students' age, sex, place of residence, major, and answers to the following questions:

1) Did the student take the recommended prerequisite course?

2) Did the student receive a grade of "C" or better in the targeted course?

3) How many quarters before taking the target course did the student take the prerequisite course?

4) Did the student receive a grade of "C" or better in the prerequisite?

5) Did the student take Composition 1 and receive a grade of "C" or better prior to taking the targeted course?

6) Did the student take Composition 1 and 2 and pass them both with grades of "C" or better prior to taking the targeted course?

The answers to these questions were coded in accordance with the code sheet (Appendix) and input on an Apple IIe microcomputer using A-Stat, a statistical analysis software program based upon Princeton University's P-Stat. A bivariate analysis of variables was conducted, the author examined the results and formed a series of inferences and conclusions. These inferences and conclusions formed the basis for the practicum report.

The following limitations were inherent in the

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study:

1) It was limited in that there is no way to divide the sample into groups of comparable ability before the students take the targeted courses, because Kirkwood Community College does not require ACT or SAT scores; nor does the College require high school transcripts; nor does the College, in any other way, pre-screen students for admission by ability or past academic performance.

2) It was limited to those students who enrolled in the targeted courses during academic year 1982-3.

3) It was limited to the courses targeted by the author. (The list appears on the following page.)

4) It was limited to the prerequisites which are recommended by the author.

5) It was limited to the information contained upon the grade sheets.

6) It was limited to the information as contained upon the students' transcripts.

The following assumptions were made by the author during the conduction of this study:

1) All students had approximately equal academic ability; they were mostly from the new, (Cross:18), and nontraditional, (Roueche:63), student populations.

2) Information on the grade sheets and the transcripts was accurate and no changes will be made.

3) Financial resources were equivilantly

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distributed throughout the population.

4) External variables which might adversely affect student grades were equivilantly and randomly spread throughout the population.

5) The random sample was representative of the student population under study.

The targeted courses and the author's recommended prerequisite which was the subject of study are as follows:

TARGETED COURSE	PREREQUISITE COURSE
1) Constitutional Law	Criminal Law
2) Applications of Criminal Law	Criminal Law
3) Criminal Evidence	Criminal Law
4) Psychology of Growth and Development	General Psychology
5) Social Psychology	General Psychology
6) Social Problems	Introduction to Sociology
7) Sociology of Poverty	Introduction to Sociology
8) Criminology	Introduction to Sociology
9) Juvenile Delinquency and Deviance	Introduction to Sociology

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Results

The results of the practicum showed a representative pupulation of students took the targeted courses. A large majority of the students were urban.

Table 1

Place of Residence
(In Percent)

Urban	66.7%
Rural	33.3%

The majority of the students in the sample were Liberal Arts majors, with Criminal Justice majors (Law Enforcement and Corrections) making up the second largest group and then Allied Health majors being the third largest group, (Table 2).

The largest age group was from 20 through 24, followed by the group that is under 20. Therefore, the majority of the students in the targeted population is under 25 years of age. None of the sample was over 45, (Table 3).

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Table 2

Student Majors
(In Percent)

Law Enforcement*	19.0
Corrections*	4.8
Teacher Associate*	3.6
Human Services*	2.4
Aide to Handicapped Children*	4.8
Liberal Arts	32.1
Undecided	2.4
Vocational-Technical	9.5
Allied Health	21.4

* = A designated "Career-option" major in the Arts and Sciences Division of the College.

Table 3

Age of Students
(In percent)

Under 20	23.5
20 through 24	44.4
25 through 29	9.9
30 through 34	16.0
35 through 39	4.9
40 through 44	1.2

The students who took the prerequisite cou[illegible]ere

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slightly more likely to get a grade of "C" or better than were the students who did not take the prerequisite course. The Chi-Square for this table was Zero, with one Degree of Freedom. This result was not statistically significant.

Table 4

Grade of "C" or better by Whether or not the Student took the Prerequisite

Grade:	"C" or better	Less than "C"
Did the Student take the Prerequisite:		
Yes	76.0%	24.0%
No	73.5%	26.5%

Students who earned a grade of "C" or better in the recommended prerequisite were more likely to get a grade of "C" or better in the targeted course. While, students who earned a grade that was less than "C" in the perrequisite were slightly more likely to earn a similiar grade in the targeted course. The Chi-Square for this table was 2.87, with one Degree of Freedom. This result was not statistically significant. (Table 5).

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Table 5

Grades of "C" or better in Prerequsite and in the Targeted Course

Targeted Course:		Yes	No
Prerequisite:			
Yes	Frequency	34.00	8.00
	Expected Frequency	31.71	10.29
	Chi-Square	.16	.51
No	Frequency	3.00	4.00
	Expected Frequency	5.29	1.71
	Chi-Square	.99	3.05

Students who took Composition 1 and 2 and received a grade which was "C," or better, were four times more likely to earn a grade of "C," or better, in the targeted course. Students who took Composition 1 and 2 and did not receive grades of "C," or better in both were most likely to receive grades of "C," or better in the targeted course. The Chi-Square for this table was .298, with one Degree of Freedom. this result was not statistically significant.

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Table 6

Grade in the Target Course by whether or not the student passed Composition 1 and 2 with a grade of "C," or better.

"C," or better in Target Course:		Yes	No
Did the Student pass Composition 1 and 2 with "C, or better grades?	Yes	80.0%	20.0%
	No	100.0%	00.0%

Female students, who comprised 59.5% of the sample, received slightly more than two percent more grades of "C," or better than they represented in the sample population, but males received seven percent more grades of less than "C" than their representation in the sample population. The Chi-Square for this table was .264, with one Degree of Freedom. This result was not statistically significant.

Table 7

Grade in Target Course by Sex

Sex:	Male	Female
Grade:		
"C," or better	38.1%	61.9%
Less than "C"	47.6%	52.4%

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The largest group of students by age, was in the age group of 21 through 25. This group composed the largest group in both those who did, and did not, receive grades of "C," or better, in the target course. The Chi-Square for this table was 5.11, with 5 degrees of freedom. This result was not statistically significant.

Table 8

Grade in the Target Course by Age (In Percent)

Age:	Under 21	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41 +
Grade:						
"C," or Better	18.3	45.0	10.0	18.3	6.7	1.7
Less than "C"	38.1	42.9	9.5	9.5	0.0	0.0

Students who passed the target course with a grade of "C," or better, represented 75% of the sample population, and were under-represented in the first thirty credit hours worth of work. They were over-represented in the 31 through 90 credit hours groups. While students who received grades which were less than "C" were over-represented in the first thirty credit hours worth of work and under-represented in the 31 through 90 credit hours groups. The Chi-Square for this table was 5.25, with six Degrees of Freedom. This result was not statistically significant. (Table 9).

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Table 9

Grade in the Target Course
by Credit Hours Earned
(In Percent)

Credit Hours Earned:	0-15	16-30	31-45	46-60	61-75	76-90	90+
Grade:							
"C," or better	22.2	25.4	14.3	17.5	1.6	8.0	11.1
Less than "C"	33.3	28.6	00.0	14.3	00.0	4.8	19.1

The students who took the target course in the quarter immediately after taking the prerequisite course formed the majority of the sample. Both groups had approximately 59% of their numbers in the first quarter. The Chi-Square for this table was 11.01, with five Degrees of Freedom. There were no cells with Chi-Squares of 3.48 or more. These results were not statistically significant.

Table 10

Grade in the Target Course by
Number of Quarters enrolled
(In Percent)

Number of Quarters:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7+
Grade:							
"C," or better	59.5	8.1	21.6	8.1	2.7	0.0	0.0
Less than "C"	58.3	33.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.3	0.0

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Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

The overall impression of the author, after examining the various tables generated by use of the Apple IIe microcomputer and A-Stat, was that the author's suggested prerequisites do influence some student grades in a positive manner. But, there does not seem to be a statistically significant impact on most students' grades whether or not they took the prerequisite course.

Those students who did take the prerequisite course were more likely to earn grades of "C," or better, and students who did not take the prerequisite course were much more likely not to earn a grade of "C," or better, in the target course. The author anticipates that failure to do well in the prerequisite course would predict a failure to do well in the target course. But, the data seems to indicate that not taking the prerequisite does not seem to adversely affect the students grade as much as taking it, and doing poorly.

The students who took Composition 1 and 2 did not appear to do significantly better, or worse, regardless of their grade outcomes in the Composition courses. This finding was in keeping with the author's expectations. It was discovered by the author during the research, that seven out of the nine target courses did not utilize essay

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examinations as the primary testing mode, and that term papers, when required, formed only a small part of the students' grade.

Female students were only slightly more likely to do better than were male students. The only explanation that the author can offer for this is that the female students tend to be older and the older students did seem to do better, once they passed 30 years of age. The male students tended to cluster in the under 21 age group and the youthfulness of students in college has traditionally been an "at risk" factor for their academic success. This finding was supported by an earlier study conducted by the author. (Koefoed, 1984:21).

The data indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in students who took the targeted course in their first quarter or their fourth quarter of enrollment. This was in accordance with the expectations of the author.

Overall, whether or not the student took the prerequisite course seemed to have no statistically significant impact on their grades. One explanation for this phenomena may be the fact that Kirkwood Community College has historically not permitted prerequisites to hinder a student's registration. Faculty members who have experience in Kirkwood's academic environment have adjusted their courses to allow for the necessary

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repetition of material. The Social Sciences faculty members who teach courses which are part of the Criminal Justice curriculum have apparently developed courses which are free-standing and independent of other courses in the total curriculum. Every course is a beginning course. In some cases, this may not have an adverse effect. In others, students may not be getting the maximum benefit from the course because some material has to be sacrificed and left out in order to deal with the repetition necessary to bring along those students who didn't get the foundation material in an earlier course.

The implications of these findings are significant in that the traditional view that prerequisites are necessary has not been supported. The limitations of the study preclude making the assumption that no prerequisites are valid. The fact is that the one's tested by the author caused the author to accept the null hypothesis. The student who takes a career parallel program and stops at the completion of the Associate Degree may suffer only the loss of potential knowledge, which may, or may not, have an impact on his or her future career advancement. On the other hand, the student who transfers to a four-year institution to pursue further education may be handicapped because of the gaps in his or her foundation in a given discipline, due to the necessary repetition caused by the lack of strong prerequisites.

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The author recommends that further research be done to seek answers to some of the questions which have been raised by this study. For example:

A) How do students who transfer to four-year institution fare in comparison to students who were matriculating at that institution or another institution during their lower division years?

B) Do students who complete the two-year curriculum accomplish as much on their jobs as students who matriculated for the first two-years at a four-year institution?

C) Do other departments at Kirkwood Community College have courses which have prerequisites, and will they stand a test such as this study provided?

D) Are there other courses which ought to have prerequisites?

Perhaps the most important question raised by this study is, have faculty members adjusted their courses to allow for the repetition of material which ought to have been covered elsewhere? If so, are the courses which are being offered in so many different formats truly comparable? The author recommends that a study be done to determine the equivilancy of courses offered at the College and courses by the same title at other nearby colleges and at the State Universities.

In conclusion, the author recommends that College

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administrators consider the ramifications of the author's finding that seven out of nine target courses do not require written material as a primary mode of evaluation, but rather, rely on multiple choice, objective tests. This recommendation is made because the recent Title III grant which was awarded the College to institute writing improvement across the curriculum.

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Appendix

Code Book For Practicum

Column & Data	Coded Response
1 - Sex.....	1 = Male.....2 = Female
2 - Age.....	1 = Under 20
	2 = 20 through 24
	3 = 25 through 29
	4 = 30 through 34
	5 = 35 through 39
	6 = 40 through 44
	7 = 45 through 49
	8 = 50 through 54
	9 = 55 and over
3 - Residence...	1 = Urban.....2 = Rural
4 - Major.....	1 = Law Enforcement
	2 = Corrections
	3 = Teacher Associate
	4 = Human Services
	5 = Aide to Handicapped Children
	6 = Liberal Arts
	7 = Undecided
	8 = All Vocational-Technical Majors
	9 = All Allied Health Occupations Majors

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5 - Quarter credit hours completed prior to taking the target course.

1 = 0 through 15

2 = 16 through 30

3 = 31 through 45

4 = 46 through 60

5 = 61 through 75

6 = 76 through 90

7 = 91 or more

6 - Did the student take the author's recommended prerequisite course?

1 = Yes

2 = No

7 - Did the student receive a grade of "C" or better in the targeted course?

1 = Yes

2 = No

8 - How many quarters before taking the targeted course did the student take the author's recommended prerequisite?

1 = 1

2 = 2

3 = 3

4 = 4

5 = 5

6 = 6

7 = 7, or more

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9 - Did the student receive a grade of "C" or better in the prerequisite course?

1 = Yes

2 = No

10 - Did the student take Composition 1 and receive a grade of "C" or better before taking the targeted course?

1 = No

2 = Yes,

11 - Did the student take Composition 1 and 2 and pass them both with a grade of "C" or better?

1 = Yes

2 = No

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